

## **Larry Houdini and Napoleon Escape**

**Jonathan D. Steinhoff, 7.27.09**

*[In a circus tent filled with a noisy crowd, Ringleader Steve stands in the center of the arena.]*

**NOTE:** *When speaking, all characters shout unless otherwise indicated.*

### **Ringleader Steve**

Ladies and Gentlemen! Today is a very special day! Today is a day that no circus anywhere has seen before, by which I mean, we have an act that none of you have ever seen before, uh, probably! **[Ringleader Steve takes a letter out of his pocket and holds it up.]** I hold in my hand, a letter from Prince Charles of England himself! **[Ringleader Steve waits for the crowd to cheer at this, but the tent is dead silent.]** That's right, Prince Charles of England! **[Again, silence.]** Okay! Well, anyway, I shall read the letter to you. It reads, and these are the exact words of Prince Charles! It reads, "Dear Ringleader Steve, Never before have I seen anything like them, and neither have you! And by them I refer to that great trapeze act, the greatest stars who ever were part of the Royal British Trapeze Society: Larry Houdini and Napoleon. Let me tell you something about these two, Ringleader Steve. Larry Houdini is none other than the actual great-great-grandson of Harry Houdini himself! And Napoleon, he is a man who only goes by the name of Napoleon, he doesn't have a last name, and even if he does have a last name, he won't tell you, so don't ask him. I like him. He, uh, he is my, uh, friend? Just Napoleon, that's his whole name, no last name! Sincerely, Prince Charles." Well, ladies and gentlemen! When Larry Houdini and Napoleon showed me this letter **[Ringleader Steve forgets himself for a moment, pausing to stare at the letter with a degree of bewilderment]**, when they showed me this letter of, uh, recommendation, from Prince Charles of England, I knew, here was an act! I didn't even need to audition them! Ladies and gentlemen, can there be any higher praise in the whole world than that which comes from Prince Charles of England himself? **[There's a smattering of applause and a few random whistles from the crowd.]** Okay then! And now I give you, without any further delay, Larry Houdini and Napoleon!

**[Ringleader Steve resumes scrutinizing the letter, confusion giving way to embarrassment, before tucking the letter back into his pocket, as Larry Houdini and Napoleon run to join him in the center of the arena. Napoleon is waving and smiling to everyone, while Larry is also smiling but unable to wave, as he is bound in a straitjacket. The two stop, bow in unison to the section of the crowd they're facing, then turn around and bow to another section of the crowd. Then Larry and Napoleon each run to the feet of the two ladders that lead up to the trapeze swings positioned at either side of the arena. A chair is lowered from the rafters to the ground towards Larry, who sits in the chair, which is then hoisted up to his trapeze stand high above, so that he can step out onto the stand. Napoleon climbs up the ladder to reach his trapeze stand.]**

### **Ringleader Steve**

**[speaking as the two are ascending]** Let me tell you something about the amazing feat you are about to see! Napoleon **[Ringleader Steve dramatically points towards Napoleon]** will swing over towards Larry Houdini **[Ringleader Steve dramatically points towards Larry]**, and amazingly, by the time Napoleon reaches Larry Houdini, Larry

Houdini will have somehow freed himself from his straitjacket, just in time to grab hold of Napoleon's feet, and the two will then swing back over to Napoleon's side!

**Napoleon**

*[muttering to himself while still climbing]* Yeah, right.

**Larry**

You know, I'm not really related to Harry Houdini! The letter says that, but it's wrong! It's completely untrue!

*[The crowd murmurs in surprise.]*

**Ringleader Steve**

What was that? Prince Charles says in the letter....

**Larry**

And that letter isn't really from Prince Charles!

**Napoleon**

Now be fair, Larry! He was Prince Charles at the time he was writing it!

**Larry**

Okay, that's true!

**Napoleon**

And last week he was Cleopatra! *[Larry and Napoleon both laugh. Ringleader Steve appears mortified.]*

**Ringleader Steve**

What's, what's wrong with you two?

**Larry**

Oh: what's wrong with us? Well.... For one thing, we're both crazy!

**Napoleon**

He's right! We escaped from an insane asylum!

**Ringleader Steve**

You escaped from....?

**Napoleon**

And then we came straight here with the letter!

**Larry**

The Prince Charles letter! *[The crowd cheers. Ringleader Steve turns around suddenly at this, staring at the cheering crowd, as his look of mortification changes to a smile.]*  
Ha-ha! That's why I'm wearing this straitjacket!

**Napoleon**

Actually, I should be in the straitjacket, not Larry! I'm the one who broke all the plates and glasses in the kitchen! But I told them Larry did it, and Larry agreed with me, so he got the straitjacket!

**Ringleader Steve**

You should be in the straitjacket?

**Larry**

I know you did it, Napoleon, I know I didn't break the plates and glasses! I know that! But, but I wanted to, only I.... just didn't have the.... nerve, I couldn't break all of the plates and glasses in the kitchen, I wanted to, but I just wasn't brave enough! I'm proud to wear a straitjacket, and I'm proud to take all the blame for, for....

**Napoleon**

You are a good friend, Larry!

**Larry**

I'm so proud of you Napoleon! I admire you so much, for breaking all the, and, and also, for your conquest of Europe too, Napoleon!

**Napoleon**

Shush, shush! No one must know who I really am!

**Larry**

You should be proud of who you are! You are Napoleon Bonaparte, Emperor of France! Do you hear that, everybody? [*The crowd cheers.* **Ringleader Steve smiles.**]

**Napoleon**

Quiet, they'll banish me to Elba again! I hate it in Elba! They make you eat green jello there!

**Larry**

But the red jello is really good, it tastes like raspberry!

**Napoleon**

That's true, the red jello isn't so bad.... Okay everyone, it is true, I am none other than Napoleon Bonaparte himself! [*The crowd cheers again.*] Viva la France!

**Ringleader Steve**

Do you hear that, everyone? Napoleon Bonaparte himself! This is truly one of the great moments, uh....So now, did, uh, did Prince Charles know you were Napoleon Bonaparte when he wrote the letter?

**Larry**

I saw Prince Charles write it! I saw him myself!

**Napoleon**

That's correct. But he's very unpredictable.

**Larry**

Very unpredictable. He, he changes a lot!

**Napoleon**

He could even be Napoleon Bonaparte right this very minute. In fact.... he is!

**Ringleader Steve**

He is? Oh! He is! So now, and Prince Charles wrote the letter of recommendation for Napoleon Bonaparte! Well, that certainly makes sense! Well, obviously you two didn't belong in an insane asylum! And so you escaped!

**Napoleon**

You mustn't tell anyone! At least, not just yet!

**Larry**

He's right, it's a secret! I forgot that part!

**Ringleader Steve**

Of course, of course! Well, are we ready then, fellows?

*[The crowd cheers. There is a drum roll, hushing the crowd, followed by a symbol crash. A timpany drum sounds. **Napoleon** grabs his trapeze and swings over towards **Larry**, who jumps off his stand, but being in a straitjacket, makes no contact with **Napoleon** whatsoever, and falls to the net below, as **Napoleon** swings back and forth a few times before letting go and falling to the net. The crowd roars.]*

**Ringleader Steve**

That was absolutely amazing! Everybody, weren't they incredible? Larry Houdini and Napoleon, of the Royal British Trapeze Society! *[The crowd roars again.]* And now, an act known everywhere, the unbelievable, surprising, hilarious, Clowns Turned Upside Down! *[The crowd cheers as the sound and image begin to fade out.]* Clowns Turned Upside Down, who will do their amazing best to put out a fire. Good luck, you crazy guys!

**THE END**